

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the following claims:

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25. (Amended) The process of claim 14, [wherein it comprises] further comprising admixing an aluminium salt.

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34. (Amended) Aqueous polysilicate microgel obtained by a process of mixing (i) an aqueous solution of alkali metal silicate with (ii) an aqueous phase of silica-based material having a pH within the range of from 4.5 to 11.

35. (Amended) The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim 28, wherein [it] the process further comprises admixing an additional salt which is a metal salt other than an aluminium salt and based on alkali metal salt or alkaline earth metal.

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Please add the following claims:

58. A process for preparing an aqueous polysilicate microgel which comprises mixing (i) an aqueous solution of alkali metal silicate with (ii) an aqueous phase of silica-based material having a pH of 11 or less and (iii) an organic acid.

59. The process of claim 36, wherein the organic acid is an organic polyacid.

60. The process of claim 36, wherein the organic acid is a polymer containing carboxylic acid groups.

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61. The process of claim 38, wherein the polymer is polyacrylic acid.

62. The process of claim 36, wherein the organic acid is a polymer containing sulphonic acid groups.

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41. The process of claim 36, wherein the organic acid is incorporated in a mixture of the alkali metal silicate and the silica-based material.

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42. The process of claim 36, wherein (ii) the aqueous phase of silica-based material having a pH of 11 or less is an acidified solution of alkali metal silicate.

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43. The process of claim 42, wherein (iii) the organic acid is added to (ii) the acidified solution of alkali metal silicate prior to mixing with (i) the aqueous solution of alkali metal silicate.

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44. The process of claim 36, wherein the polysilicate microgel obtained has a molar ratio $\text{SiO}_2:\text{M}_2\text{O}$, where M is alkali metal, between 3:1 and 20:1.

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45. The process of claim 1, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel obtained has a SiO_2 content of at least 5% by weight.

46. The process of claim 1, wherein the polysilicate microgel has a specific surface area of at least $1000 \text{ m}^2/\text{g}$.

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47. Aqueous polysilicate microgel obtained by mixing (i) an aqueous solution of alkali metal silicate with (ii) an aqueous phase of silica-based material having a pH of 11 or less and (iii) an organic acid.

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48. The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim 47, wherein the organic acid is an organic polyacid.

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49. The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim 47, wherein the organic acid is a polymer containing carboxylic acid groups.

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cont.

75. ^{56.} The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim ⁷⁷, wherein the polymer is polyacrylic acid.

76. ^{51.} The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim ⁷⁷, wherein the organic acid is a polymer containing sulphonic acid groups.

77. ^{52.} The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim ⁷⁷, wherein the organic acid is incorporated in a mixture of the alkali metal silicate and the silica-based material.

78. ^{53.} The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim ⁷⁷, wherein (ii) the aqueous phase of silica-based material having a pH of 11 or less is an acidified solution of alkali metal silicate.

79. ^{54.} The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim ⁵³, wherein (iii) the organic acid is added to (ii) the acidified solution of alkali metal silicate prior to mixing with (i) the aqueous solution of alkali metal silicate.

80. ^{55.} The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim ⁷⁷, wherein the polysilicate microgel obtained has a molar ratio $\text{SiO}_2:\text{M}_2\text{O}$, where M is alkali metal, between 3:1 and 20:1.

81. ^{56.} The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim ⁷⁷, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel obtained has a SiO_2 content of at least 5% by weight.

82. ^{57.} The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim ⁷⁷, wherein the polysilicate microgel has a specific surface area of at least $1000 \text{ m}^2/\text{g}$.

83. ^{58.} The process of claim 1, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel prepared by the process is anionic.

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9. *59.* The process of claim 1, further comprising a step of diluting the aqueous polysilicate microgel by adding an aqueous solution or suspension.

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cont.*
17 60. The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim *8*, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel is anionic.

18 61. A drainage/dewatering aid comprising the polysilicate microgel of claim *11*.

19 62. The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim *8*, further comprising an organic polymer.

20 63. The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim *8*, further comprising an amount of aqueous solution or suspension effective to dilute the aqueous polysilicate microgel.

31 64. The process of claim *14*, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel prepared by the process is anionic.

32 65. The process of claim *14*, further comprising a step of diluting the aqueous polysilicate microgel by adding an aqueous solution or suspension.

37 66. The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim *28*, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel is anionic.

38 67. A drainage/dewatering aid comprising the polysilicate microgel of claim *28*.

39 68. The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim *23*, further comprising an organic polymer.

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40. *39.* The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim *38*, further comprising an amount of aqueous solution or suspension effective to dilute the aqueous polysilicate microgel.

49. *42.* The process of claim *26*, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel prepared by the process is anionic.

50. *42.* The process of claim *26*, further comprising a step of diluting the aqueous polysilicate microgel by adding an aqueous solution or suspension.

54. *52.* The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim *38*, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel is anionic.

52. *55.* A drainage/dewatering aid comprising the polysilicate microgel of claim *38*.

56. *52.* The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim *38*, further comprising an organic polymer.

57. *52.* The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim *38*, further comprising an amount of aqueous solution or suspension effective to dilute the aqueous polysilicate microgel.

67. *58.* The process of claim *36*, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel prepared by the process is anionic.

68. *58.* The process of claim *36*, further comprising a step of diluting the aqueous polysilicate microgel by adding an aqueous solution or suspension.

83. *72.* The aqueous polysilicate microgel of claim *41*, wherein the aqueous polysilicate microgel is anionic.